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ABSTRACT

When state governments in Australia decentralized many administrative responsibilities to schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was assumed that they would develop fresh management, development, and governance capacities. In general, such decentralization attempted to replace bureaucracies with corporate management, limit school evaluation to the auditing of performance indicators, cut support structures in favor of contracted expertise, and displace hierarchy with collegial networks. The principle of public accountability was redefined in public education as a local issue to be resolved largely through site management, market, and political mechanisms. This paper presents research findings that show that Tasmanian parents prefer a more educative and communitarian approach to accountability, and that this view is broadly shared with other key stakeholders--teachers, principals, and state government officials. Parents were slightly more likely than other stakeholders to prefer greater subsidiarity, pluriformity, and complimentarity in their schools and education system, rather than neocentralist and "self-managing" corporate managerialism, uniformity, and comparability. Data were derived from a questionnaire sent to parents, teachers, department of education administrators, and principals in 28 primary, district high, and high schools in Tasmania. Six tables are included. (Contains 25 references.) (Author/LMI)

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Paper presented at the AERA Conference, New York, 1996

# Contractual or responsive accountability? Neo-centralist 'self-management' or systemic subsidiarity? Tasmanian parents' and other stakeholders' policy preferences.

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# Contractual or responsive accountability? Neo-centralist 'self-management' or systemic subsidiarity? Tasmanian parents' and other stakeholders' policy preferences.

R J S Macpherson, University of Tasmania

*When state governments decentralised many administrative responsibilities to schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was assumed that they would develop fresh management, development and governance capacities. In general, such decentralisation attempted to replace bureaucracies with corporate management, limit school evaluation to the auditing of performance indicators, cut support structures in favour of contracted expertise, and displace hierarchy with collegial networks. The principle of public accountability was redefined in public education as a local issue to be resolved largely through site management, market and political mechanisms.*

*The research reported here shows that Tasmanian parents prefer a far more educative and communitarian approach to accountability, and that this view is broadly shared with other key stakeholders; teachers, principals and state government officials. And slightly more so that other stakeholders, parents prefer greater subsidiarity, pluriformity and complimentarity in their schools and education system, rather than neo-centralist and 'self-managing' corporate managerialism, uniformity and comparability.*

## INTRODUCTION

Most public schools in Australia exhibit the characteristics of a 'self-managing school,' not unlike 'school-based management' (SBM) in the US and 'local management of schools' (LMS) in England and Wales. The introduction of this approach in Australia has been shown (Beare, 1995) to be due to the confluence of economic, political and ideological forces in the late 1980s. The original formulation of the 'self-managing school' (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988) was derived from early US school effectiveness literature and then developed with international consultancies (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992, p. viii) and scholarship (Beare *et al.*, 1989; Chapman, 1990).

Australian research into school 'self-management' has drawn attention to the dangers of an uncritical faith in corporate managerialism, such as the displacement of educational metavalues like quality pedagogy, democracy and social equity (Chapman and Dunstan, 1991, Angus, 1992). Wohlstetter & Odden (1992) have shown that the concept of SBM has become pervasive in the US although there are many forms in existence without clear goals or systematic accountability structures. They also found little real delegation of authority, a primary concern for teacher morale and satisfaction, and that the links between SBM and student learning have remained obscure. More recent research (Wohlstetter *et al.*, 1995) has shown that none of the 'school charter' laws passed in eleven states by the end of 1994 to tighten accountabilities have linked district support, school improvement and classroom development. SBM appears to be a policy myth that defines educators as solely accountable for student learning while ingratiating neo-centralism in policy making and in the financial management of contraction.

Similarly, in the UK, LMS has transformed the way that schools are managed and given expression to a New Right myth of greater educational choice, essentially by imposing new

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political, managerial and market mechanisms (Levacic, 1995). An array of technical and philosophical problems have been encountered (Gray and Wilcox, 1994). Yet, despite considerable pressure from the centre, schools are using their self governing powers to vote repeatedly against 'opting out' of Local Education Authority (LEA) control. Many school communities are refusing to set aside co-operative networks in LEAs in favour of competition. Governors are supporting educators more and more, even to the extent of defying the national government with deficit budgets. Many schools are developing more educative evaluation and development strategies to supplement the formal and blunt accountability mechanisms of Ofsted's school inspections and standard student assessment tasks (Vann, 1995). Accumulating evidence (Keys & Fernandes, 1990; Earley 1994; Levacic, 1995) indicates that school governing bodies are providing supportive and advisory services while moving steadily towards the adoption of their legislated role of local public accountability.

It can, therefore, be hypothesised that the New Right's neo-centralist attempt in England and Wales to create a politics of choice and local contractual accountability is being challenged by a politics of subsidiarity that values responsive accountability. Contractual accountability refers to the answerability of educators while responsive accountability is about taking into account the requirements of all interested parties when making educational policy and operational decisions (Halstead, 1994, p. 149). Subsidiarity is an organisational principle that holds that "decisions should be made at the lowest possible level (Casey, 1993, p. 173). The rationale for this principle has been traced (McBrien, 1990, p. 1044):

> The principle of subsidiarity was first formally articulated by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quadrogessimo Anno* (1931): 'It is a fundamental principle of social philosophy, fixed and unchangeable, that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise and industry. So, too, it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and a disturbance of right order, to transfer to a larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided by lesser and subordinate bodies.' (cited by John XXII's *Mater et Magistera*, 1961, para 53).

Today the subsidiarity principle is taken to imply that "Any collectivity, before it usurps the power vested in the local body, must show cause why it can discharge that function better, more efficiently, more humanely, more skilfully" (Beare, 1995, p. 147). The principle of subsidiarity is at odds with the neo-centralism driving standardised forms of school 'self-management', SBM and LMS. It has two corollary principles; pluriformity and complimentarity. Pluriformity is the encouragement, development and celebration of diverse problem-solving structures. Complimentarity values collegiality and co-operative action between diverse member units for the greater common good. To illustrate, the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (1987) recognised that it:

> in its role of overall policy formulation, shall be sensitive to the special character of those schools foundered and directed by a Religious Institute ... Conscious of the special charisma of each Religious Institute as a gift to the Church, the Commission shall endeavour to foster that special expression of the elements of Catholic Education which flows from that charisma. In doing this it will be preserving that special pluriformity that has been characteristic of, and very special to, the history of the Catholic school.

Of immediate interest here is the extent to which parents and other stakeholders in the 'home' of 'self-managing' schools, Tasmania, actually prefer contractual or responsive forms of accountability, and the principles of subsidiarity, pluriformity and complimentarity instead of 'self-management.' uniform structures and comparing the performance of learners, teachers and leaders in a context of neo-centralism.

## CONTEXT

There is persistent evidence in systems and at national level in Australia that parents are deeply concerned with accountability policies and practices. One example at each level must suffice, both examples focussing on the assessment and reporting of student learning. In 1993, the then Tasmanian Minister of Education, the Hon John Beswick, commissioned his independent policy advisory reference group, the Tasmanian Education Council (TEC), to advise on (a) parents' opinions concerning the nature and frequency of reports from schools and parents, (b) the type of information parents preferred, and (c) the extent to which reports on students should provide information about a student's performance compared with that of other students. The TEC's survey gained responses from 2166 parents and another 21 extended responses from schools and school organisations. The data were cautiously interpreted.

The TEC (1993) reported that the most frequent requests from parents were for written reports once a term, formal parent/ teacher interviews twice a year (essentially current general practice) and curriculum information sessions early in the year (far less common in practice) outlining (a) the program to be covered and (b) identifying expected learning outcomes. General satisfaction was recorded with recent initiatives, such as journals and folios, which had helped improve parental awareness of student learning. The importance of early advice of educational or behavioural difficulties, and collaboration between teachers and parents, were both emphasised. With regards to the data that parents valued, the survey showed that they wanted accurate information on curriculum content, expected learning outcomes, their child's academic progress, their child's attitude, behaviour and social skills, their strengths and weaknesses, and how they as parents could help their child learn. The TEC also found (p. 8)

> overwhelming support for some type of comparative assessment and reporting. Parents, particularly in the primary sector, are keen to have some form of 'benchmark' by which to evaluate their child's educational development. They particularly stressed the need for having a statement of expected learning outcomes early in the school year, against which they could evaluate their child's progress during the year.

There was no evidence offered by the TEC about the demand for norm-referenced and standardised testing of numeracy and reading (then current practice in Tasmania at Years 10 and 14, now suspended). On the other hand, the TEC did conclude that (a) parent education in the area of criterion-based assessment and (b) a central clarification of educational goals and operational guidelines, particularly for early childhood and primary education, would be seen as helpful by parents. To this latter end the TEC offered a draft policy comprising 'educational objectives' and an 'educational framework' intended to ensure that the accountability procedures in Tasmanian schools were both flexible and effective. On the other hand, the TEC (1993, p. 10) insisted that there was a major structural limitation to more effective accountability policies in Tasmanian schools:

> If mechanisms such as this are going to work, they need to be under control of, and accountable to, a school-based authority. We believe that the best way for this to happen is through school councils. Therefore the Council is concerned that, in the proposed new Education Act, schools councils have not been made compulsory.

While the Tasmanian government responded by seeking to accelerate the formation of more school councils, the tone and thrust of this advice remain pertinent. They cohere with more recent national expressions of parents' views. The two peak national parent's bodies of Australia, the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACCSO) and the Australian Parents Council (APC), collaborated to articulate their joint perspective on assessment and reporting (ACCSO/ APC, 1996). Extensive consultations in affiliated state organisations had identified six key parental needs (p. 5):

> to feel welcome and comfortable in their children's school, and confident in offering suggestions and comments; opportunities and encouragement to share knowledge of their children and their children's experience of school with their children's teachers; to realise a partnership with teachers for the children's learning at school; to ensure and be assured that their children achieve optimum levels of literacy and numeracy; written reports covering all facets of their children's progress at school and which describe a relationship to the progress of children their age, and; exit reports encompassing the range of their children's academic and co-curricular achievements and participation at school.

ACCSO/ APC (1996, p. 6) concluded that twelve principles should underpin effective, just, equitable and ethically defensible assessment and reporting procedures intended to provide balanced, comprehensive and valid information:

1. Parents are entitled to continuing, quality information regarding their children's education through a variety of reporting mechanisms.

2. Any form of assessment should be integral to the curriculum and designed to inform, support and improve learning outcomes.

3. Assessment and reporting processes should make provision for parent and student input about teaching and learning.

4. Parents and their organisations must have an active role in developing and implementing assessment and reporting policies and processes at the school, the system, the state and the nation.

5. Assessment data must not be used for the purpose of establishing and publishing competitive judgements about schools/ systems/ states or territories.

7. Parents must be informed by all those who seek such data about student performance, of the uses to which such information will be put.

8. Data collected from students in school should be used in accordance with its stated purposes. Any subsequent uses should be specifically negotiated.

9. Individual student assessments are confidential to the student, his/ her parents and appropriate school staff.

10. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from specific system, statewide and national testing.

11. Assessment data for statewide or national purposes should be collected by statistically valid, light sampling procedures only.

12. Appropriate appeal mechanisms should be established and made public to protect the rights of students and parents in matters of student assessment and reporting at the school, state and national level.

The case made by ACCSO/ APC for improving the assessment and reporting of student learning defined accountability as part of and subsequent to formative evaluation, promoted a mutually respectful partnership between stakeholders including the joint interpretation of data, argued for the development of trustworthy databases and benchmarks of achievement, and gave primacy to the interests of learners, parents and responsive professionals. The sophistication of the case was impressive. It was situated in a context of social and cultural change, labour market and technological change, rising demand for participatory policy making and decision making, saliency of educational 'outcomes' and the potential 'narrowing' of curriculum and testing, while urging caution, ongoing professional development and equal attention to inputs, process and outcomes.

There are four features common to the TEC survey findings and the ACCSO/ APC policy recommendations; (a) the need for coherent systemic policies supported by stakeholders that are to be applied sensitively at classroom, school and system levels, (b) the need for transparent, educative, fair, sensitive and rigorous processes, (c) the need for appropriate, explicit and comprehensive criteria, and (d) that system accountability obligations are subordinate or additional to those to be discharged in classrooms and schools, and, therefore, that systemic processes and criteria are to be derived from or to cohere with rather than determine classroom and school accountability practices. This helps justify the hypothesis that parents of public school children prefer organisational subsidiarity, pluriformity and complimentarity rather than neo-centralist accountability structures characterised by corporate managerialism, uniformity and comparability. The hypothesis was examined as part of a broader study of accountability policy preferences.

## METHODS

The Educative Accountability Policies in Locally-managed Schools project was commissioned in Tasmania by the Department of Education and the Arts (DEA) in 1992, with subsequent support coming from the University of Tasmania and the Australian Research Council Small and Large Grants Schemes. Since the detailed methodology is available elsewhere (Macpherson, 1996a), the research questions and methods used may be summarised.

Two research questions were used; (a) what processes (procedures, actions or methods) *should* be used to collect data, report on and improve students' learning, teachers' teaching and leaders' leadership, and (b) what criteria (standards, benchmarks or indicators) *should* be used to evaluate students' learning, teachers' teaching and leaders' leadership?

Qualitative data were gathered by school community workshops and interviews in a one-eighth stratified sample of schools ($n_1$=28). Data were also collected from all stakeholder executive teams and DEA District and Central officials. A draft 73 item questionnaire was then trialed with teachers in the first sample of schools and gained a 66% return rate. As the number of stratified and opportunistic samples of parents, other teachers, principals and system administrators increased in 1993, the *Accountability Policy Questionnaire (APQ)* was gradually expanded to 134 items to accommodate all views. This inclusionary approach meant that all qualitative data from all interest groups were used to develop the instrument which was then used in 1994 to measure the intensity of support for each proposal in each stakeholder group.

A two-stage stratified sample was then used. There are 209 primary, district high and high schools in Tasmania. Special schools and secondary colleges (Years 11-12) serve regions and were excluded from this study. This second one-eighth sample ($n_2$=28) was structured to be proportionately representative of type, size, rurality, educational needs of students and isolation, using DEA classifications. Then, in each school, the principal was asked to invite the 10 parents and 10 teachers most interested in educational policy making to respond to the instrument. Given their responsibilities, and uneven populations, all primary, district high and secondary principals, all district DEA personnel, and all central DEA personnel with schools-related functions were surveyed. While all types of schools were appropriately represented, district high school parents, teachers and principals were slightly over represented. On the other hand, district high schools tend to be in relatively conservative and rural locations, more often facing questions of viability, have less experienced staff and to be more transparent to their communities than larger urban schools.

Analysis strategy was in large part determined by the views of the stakeholder leaders comprising the project's informal reference group. For example, support for each of the 134 policy options in the *APQ* was measured and classified as percentages of respondents in each subgroup expressing strong agreement (SA), agreement (A), not sure (NS), disagreement (D) and strong disagreement (SD). The responses SA, A, NS, D and SD were assigned the values 1-5 and means, modes and standard deviations were calculated. The statistical significance of variance was, however, of little interest among stakeholder leaders who, instead, shared a concern for 'political significance'. They came to the view that when more that 70% of a group indicated that they Strongly Agreed or Agreed with a proposal, the item was deemed to be 'supported'. When the total percentage strongly agreeing and agreeing with a policy option was between 30 and 70, support was deemed to be 'ambivalent'. Where less that 30% of a group agreed or strongly agreed to a policy proposal, the item was held to be 'unsupported'. Despite this shared view of 'political significance', the differences between parents means and all respondents' means on all 134 items were tested for statistical significance (ie. $p < 0.05$) using the *t* test.

Seminars and workshops were then used to help interpret, disseminate and apply the findings in schools and in systems on demand. The general findings and epistemological implications of this approach to accountability policy research have also been discussed elsewhere (Macpherson, 1996b; 1996c).

To summarise this section, an iterative and co-operative policy research process used qualitative and quantitative methods to create categories, and thus, to identify (a) stakeholders' policy preferences concerning accountability criteria and processes, and (b) how Tasmanian parents' perspectives compare with other stakeholders' views. Findings are now reported. The columns in the tables below labelled % indicate the percentage that Strongly Agreed *added* to the percentage that Agreed to each proposal.

## FINDINGS

The findings of immediate interest are the extent to which parents supported accountability processes and criteria proposed by all stakeholders, and how well their views matched the views of other stakeholders. Table 1 compares support for methods proposed for collecting data, reporting on and improving students' learning.

***Table 1 Support for proposed processes to collect data, report on and improve students' learning***

| Processes Proposed by All Stakeholders | Parents' Views | | All Groups' Views | | Differences of Means | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUPPORTED | Mean | % | Mean | % | *t* | p< |
| parent /teacher interviews | 1.42 | 97.2 | 1.46 | 97.2 | 0.42 | ns |
| teachers evaluate and plan lessons thoroughly | 1.57 | 96.5 | 1.58 | 96.4 | 2.48 | .02 |
| teachers written checklists and running records | 1.67 | 89.1 | 1.93 | 82.7 | 3.61 | .001 |
| conferencing between teacher and student | 1.81 | 93.1 | 1.74 | 93.2 | 1.21 | ns |
| parent input and policy explanations | 1.72 | 92.8 | 1.82 | 90.0 | 1.58 | ns |
| the sampling of student work (eg. folios) | 1.73 | 92.5 | 1.77 | 91.1 | 0.64 | ns |
| reports - clear and accurate descriptions of learning | 1.73 | 92.2 | 1.89 | 86.8 | 2.69 | .01 |
| parent/teacher/student discussions | 1.76 | 91.6 | 1.80 | 91.9 | 0.64 | ns |
| teachers identify outcomes for each student | 1.72 | 91.7 | 1.80 | 89.3 | 1.18 | ns |
| teachers' observations | 1.78 | 98.0 | 1.71 | 97.9 | 1.48 | ns |
| reporting through publications and public relations | 1.85 | 87.5 | 1.84 | 87.3 | 0.12 | ns |
| parents given goals, expected outcomes, and individual expectations at the beginning of each year | 1.90 | 84.0 | 2.12 | 73.5 | 2.44 | .02 |
| support-staff reports; guidance, welfare, speech, health | 1.93 | 84.2 | 1.99 | 83.4 | 0.77 | ns |
| teachers evaluate and plan programs systematically | 1.94 | 86.2 | 1.77 | 91.8 | 0.17 | ns |
| teacher-designed mastery and diagnostic tests | 2.10 | 82.5 | 1.93 | 87.7 | 1.14 | ns |
| AMBIVALENT SUPPORT | | | | | | |
| student's own self assessment | 2.16 | 63.5 | 1.92 | 82.5 | 2.63 | .01 |
| reports with marks or grades | 2.19 | 71.7 | 2.89 | 47.6 | 5.70 | .001 |
| formative evaluation related to teaching objectives | 2.27 | 63.7 | 2.17 | 73.6 | 1.54 | ns |
| statewide, norm-referenced, standardised tests of Literacy and Numeracy | 2.27 | 72.1 | 2.70 | 54.2 | 4.03 | .001 |
| P & Fs/Schools Councils review, discuss and report learning | 2.80 | 46.5 | 3.09 | 33.4 | 9.28 | .001 |
| peer appraisal | 3.48 | 18.1 | 3.05 | 35.1 | 4.49 | .001 |
| UNSUPPORTED | | | | | | |
| reports allow parents to compare child with others | 3.66 | 23.1 | 3.89 | 17.0 | 1.97 | .05 |

The four most evident features of Table 1 are (a) the extent of available touchstone concerning processes, (b) the identification of 'best practices', (c) that accounting for student learning is to be contextualised not at school or system level but in the classroom, and (d) that the preferred accountability processes related to learning should focus largely on improving relationships and collaborative action research in classrooms. The statistically significant differences between parents' and other's mean responses to supported items can be set aside given the high levels of political support. The unexpected variance in support of statewide, norm-referenced, standardised tests of literacy and numeracy was related to other technical concerns and soon led to the suspension of such testing. The expected variance of support for peer appraisal, involving Parents and Friends (P&F) or Schools Councils and the use of marks and grades in reports confirmed that these proposals remain controversial. The finding that

less than one in four parents wanted to compare their child's learning to others destroyed a myth to the contrary long held by some other stakeholders.

Table 2 compares levels of support for all criteria suggested by stakeholders for evaluating students' learning.

***Table 2 Support for proposed criteria for evaluating students' learning***

| Processes Proposed by All Stakeholders | Parents' Views | | All Groups' Views | | Differences of Means | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUPPORTED | Mean | % | Mean | % | *t* | p< |
| measures of individual progress | 1.72 | 97.2 | 1.77 | 93.2 | 0.86 | ns |
| student attitudes to school, teachers, peers, learning and homework | 1.79 | 93.8 | 1.90 | 89.4 | 1.72 | ns |
| measures of students' self-esteem and life skills | 1.80 | 88.2 | 1.94 | 84.4 | 2.04 | .05 |
| results of objective assessment used in plans | 1.86 | 94.5 | 1.85 | 92.7 | 0.19 | ns |
| indicators developed jointly by parent, teacher, student | 1.97 | 70.1 | 2.13 | 77.8 | 2.29 | .05 |
| performance indicators developed within schools by teachers | 2.06 | 81.3 | 1.95 | 85.4 | 1.63 | ns |
| indicators from research literature used in planning | 2.15 | 78.7 | 2.17 | 72.7 | 1.51 | ns |
| criteria developed by research in the classroom | 2.15 | 75.2 | 2.24 | 71.4 | 1.40 | ns |
| performance indicators developed by teachers through subject moderation | 2.16 | 76.2 | 2.23 | 72.0 | 1.18 | ns |
| judgements by teachers | 2.25 | 75.8 | 1.99 | 84.2 | 3.44 | .001 |
| AMBIVALENT SUPPORT | | | | | | |
| performance indicators in state and national policy documents | 2.29 | 65.3 | 1.99 | 84.2 | 2.20 | .05 |
| student participation rates (attendance, retention) | 2.30 | 71.0 | 2.24 | 66.4 | 2.79 | .01 |
| parental expectations | 2.84 | 45.6 | 2.96 | 37.6 | 1.16 | ns |

Table 2 exhibits strong agreement between stakeholders over which learning evaluation criteria should be used. It is equally evident that all stakeholders believe that measurement should occur in the classroom and that a broad range of indicators of action research and improving classroom relationships should be used. Again, little can be drawn from statistically significant differences except some reluctance by parents to rely solely on teachers' judgements. All stakeholders, moreover, acknowledge the legitimacy of external criteria such as national profiles of learning, state performance indicators, research findings and moderation standards. There is some ambivalence over using participation rates as a proxy for learning and considerable doubt in all stakeholder groups over using parental expectations, a point revisited below.

It will recalled that the *APQ* also measured support for accountability processes and criteria concerned with the quality of teaching and leadership. Table 3 overleaf summaries the levels of support for all processes suggested by stakeholders to collect data, report on and improve teachers' teaching.

***Table 3 Support for proposed processes for collecting data, reporting on and improving teachers' teaching***

| Processes Proposed by All Stakeholders | Parents' Views | | All Groups' Views | | Differences of Means | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUPPORTED | Mean | % | Mean | % | *t* | p< |
| discussion between colleagues | 1.57 | 95.9 | 1.38 | 98.4 | 3.10 | .001 |
| training and support to identify and cope with 'at-risk' students | 1.56 | 96.5 | 1.54 | 97.7 | 0.52 | ns |
| planned development of teachers | 1.72 | 92.4 | 1.49 | 95.8 | 3.66 | .001 |
| report teacher appraisals to the individual teacher | 1.73 | 89.5 | 1.64 | 92.7 | 1.48 | ns |
| encourage teachers to read and do research | 1.76 | 94.2 | 1.86 | 88.0 | 1.58 | ns |
| transition program for newly appointed teachers | 1.89 | 79.6 | 1.86 | 80.4 | 0.37 | ns |
| co-operative learning between colleagues (eg mentoring) | 1.99 | 87.6 | 1.80 | 92.0 | 3.35 | .001 |
| appraisal of student outcomes | 2.04 | 84.2 | 2.09 | 80.3 | 0.78 | ns |
| self-evaluation | 2.10 | 81.4 | 1.82 | 89.7 | 3.49 | .001 |
| individual and senior staff discuss appraisals | 2.14 | 76.0 | 2.28 | 70.4 | 1.69 | ns |
| an appraisal of planning | 2.17 | 81.2 | 2.16 | 81.6 | 0.16 | ns |
| documentation of best practices | 2.18 | 73.1 | 2.06 | 78.1 | 1.75 | ns |
| feedback and appraisal by peers | 2.20 | 72.8 | 2.00 | 81.5 | 2.43 | .02 |
| negotiating new goals for professional development | 2.23 | 75.8 | 1.92 | 88.3 | 4.32 | .001 |
| AMBIVALENT SUPPORT | | | | | | |
| the planned development of classrooms | 2.16 | 72.5 | 2.28 | 65.3 | 1.63 | ns |
| feedback and appraisal by parents | 2.21 | 70.3 | 2.60 | 52.8 | 3.87 | .001 |
| report teaching quality to the DEA for promotion and school development purposes | 2.24 | 69.8 | 2.55 | 55.4 | 4.03 | .001 |
| standardised test results go back to the individual teacher | 2.27 | 73.4 | 2.47 | 63.4 | 2.37 | .02 |
| the school review process | 2.29 | 61.9 | 2.22 | 66.4 | 0.86 | ns |
| feedback and appraisal by more senior school colleagues | 2.34 | 71.3 | 2.44 | 65.7 | 1.37 | ns |
| opportunity for parents to develop as co-teachers | 2.42 | 62.9 | 2.58 | 55.2 | 1.82 | ns |
| opportunities for parents to consult and co-plan teaching programs | 2.58 | 54.9 | 2.88 | 42.3 | 2.85 | .01 |
| feedback and appraisal by students | 2.63 | 54.8 | 2.59 | 65.9 | 0.42 | ns |
| assess teacher's contribution to school planning | 2.72 | 54.2 | 2.72 | 52.3 | 0.00 | ns |
| feedback and appraisal by an independent expert | 2.52 | 51.0 | 2.89 | 36.0 | 3.43 | .001 |
| feedback and appraisal by the P&F/School Council | 2.69 | 51.4 | 3.11 | 32.0 | 3.94 | .001 |
| P&F/School Council discuss teacher and classroom development | 2.87 | 43.0 | 3.23 | 29.0 | 3.31 | ns |
| reporting of teacher appraisals to colleagues as part of professional development | 2.93 | 38.9 | 3.20 | 30.6 | 2.94 | .01 |
| network more effectively with the teachers' union | 2.93 | 30.1 | 2.96 | 28.8 | 0.33 | ns |
| general reporting of teacher appraisals to parents as part of school planning and development | 3.12 | 36.8 | 3.69 | 19.8 | 5.11 | .001 |
| UNSUPPORTED | | | | | | |
| the selection of teachers should be more localised | 3.15 | 27.4 | 3.35 | 23.9 | 2.04 | .05 |

When compared to the levels of agreement exhibited in Tables 1 and 2, Table 3 suggests that there is comparatively less touchstone available to stakeholders concerning teaching accountability processes. This suggests that the quality of teaching is a less salient policy issue that the quality of teaching in terms of accountability. On the other hand, the policy proposals supported by all stakeholders suggests that accounting for and improving the quality of teaching is not seen as a classroom or system issue but as a school responsibility, with school

defined as a community of professionals. The focus is on the quality of professional appraisal and feedback, professional relationships and co-development, and collegial action research and planning. On the other hand, some parents are doubtful about the efficacy of methods that rely so heavily on local intra-professionalism, and all stakeholders doubt the capacity of the Tasmanian school review process to improve teaching.

The considerable number of proposals supported by parents yet doubted by other stakeholders were then examined in closer detail. The minor ambivalence over 'planned development of classrooms' was traced to small number of district high school teachers and secondary school principals. Ambivalence over feedback and appraisal from parents was felt most acutely by secondary and district high school teachers, district DEA personnel, and primary and secondary school principals. These findings came as no surprise; district high schools have a unique context as noted above, high schools tend to be less responsive structurally, and parents' complaints not resolved by schools are referred to district DEA personnel.

What was unanticipated was the degree to which teachers were generally reluctant to support links between the quality of teaching and promotion or school development, feedback and appraisal by more senior colleagues, parents having opportunities to co-plan or to develop as co-teachers, or for parents to be involved in planning improvements to teaching. Teachers, principals and DEA personnel were markedly more reluctant to accept independent or parental expertise than were parents. In sum, Table 3 suggests that parents' desire to provide feedback and participate in the development of teaching services is unlikely to be satisfied until DEA personnel, principals and teachers become more responsive and broaden the strategic base of school improvement beyond what is seen by parents to be an over-exclusive reliance on teacher development. When the implications of Tables 1-3 are taken together, it suggests that parents would prefer that the improvement of learning and teaching be attempted through an integrated approach to classroom development and school improvement. Instead of more teacher development for individual teachers or groups of teachers, parents appear to be asking for teaching accountability processes that will affirm and improve professionalism in a school community context.

This impression is confirmed in Table 4 where the responses to criteria proposed by all stakeholders to evaluate the quality of teaching are compared.

***Table 4 Support for criteria for evaluating teachers' teaching***

| Criteria Proposed by All Stakeholders | Parents' Views | | All Groups' Views | | Differences of Means | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUPPORTED | Mean | % | Mean | % | *t* | p< |
| classroom environment | 1.68 | 93.2 | 1.60 | 95.3 | 1.18 | ns |
| organisational skills | 1.78 | 93.2 | 1.79 | 92.0 | 0.15 | ns |
| how well work is set, monitored and marked | 1.79 | 91.1 | 2.00 | 83.5 | 2.87 | .01 |
| interpersonal communications within the classroom | 1.84 | 90.3 | 1.70 | 94.7 | 2.38 | .02 |
| behaviour management skills | 1.80 | 92.5 | 1.79 | 91.5 | 0.16 | ns |
| teachers' attitudes to students, parents and colleagues | 1.86 | 88.2 | 1.97 | 85.1 | 1.56 | ns |
| student progress | 1.82 | 86.9 | 1.99 | 81.0 | 2.03 | .05 |
| teachers' knowledge of subject and child/adolescent development | 1.88 | 89.0 | 1.86 | 90.1 | 0.30 | ns |
| the attitude of children (eg enthusiasm) | 1.93 | 82.6 | 2.10 | 76.5 | 2.04 | .05 |
| instructional expertise | 2.01 | 83.4 | 2.03 | 82.3 | 0.33 | ns |
| effective implementation of school and curriculum policies | 2.12 | 82.1 | 2.02 | 85.7 | 1.71 | ns |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| willingness to engage in continuing professional development | 2.13 | 77.1 | 2.08 | 77.9 | 0.51 | ns |
| SUPPORT AMBIVALENT | | | | | | |
| effectiveness of teachers' written records and plans | 2.25 | 74.1 | 2.46 | 65.8 | 2.38 | .02 |
| students' achievement levels in K-12 Framework | 2.25 | 62.3 | 2.39 | 62.0 | 1.81 | ns |
| teachers competencies in DEA job descriptions | 2.42 | 56.5 | 2.40 | 63.6 | 0.25 | ns |
| communication skills with stakeholders | 2.43 | 53.9 | 2.23 | 67.0 | 2.85 | .01 |
| teachers' participation in school and community activities | 2.66 | 53.9 | 2.83 | 52.0 | 1.60 | ns |
| leadership services given by teachers in school | 2.69 | 50.7 | 2.66 | 52.0 | 0.35 | ns |

The presence of extensive touchstone criteria is strongly evident in Table 4, despite further evidence that educators are sometimes reluctant to accept school community and systemic perspectives. This could be explained by professionalism being biased by careerism to the stage where accountability is seen as 'politically incorrect' (Macpherson, 1996d). Compared to the learning criteria in Table 2, there is also less acknowledgment in Table 4 of the value of external profiles of competencies, research or extra-professional interests. Only three of the fifteen criteria require systemic involvement; those concerning the effective implementation of school and curriculum policies, the use of K-12 achievement levels and teacher competencies in DEA job descriptions. All stakeholders assume that 15 of 18 criteria can be defined and operationalised by using or developing the expertise of each school community. Similarly, it is believed that the measurement and improvement of teaching should be a normal part of school life and that indicators of professionalism should relate teachers' knowledge, attitudes and skills to outcomes in the classroom.

In sum, it appears that all stakeholders expect accountability obligations concerned with the quality of teaching to be defined and discharged in each school community with supportive interaction between these learning organisations. While parents are asking educators to be more responsive to broader school community values, and join all other groups seeking better school pedagogical policies and practices, all stakeholders (including DEA personnel) appear to limit the satisfaction of systemic priorities to the implementation of curriculum policies. Put another way, preferred accountability policies and practices related to the quality of teaching imply high levels of subsidiarity, pluriformity and complementarity.

The third part of the *APQ* measured support for accountability processes and criteria concerned with the quality of leadership. The instrument defined leaders as those who provide leadership services in school communities. Table 5 overleaf summarises the levels of support for all processes suggested by stakeholders to collect data, report on and improve leaders' leadership services.

Five striking features of Table 5 are; (a) the area of policy touchstone available is comparatively more compact than in Tables 1 and 3, (b) the extent to which preferred accountability processes assume that leadership is a responsive service to colleagues and school community, not to classroom or system, (c) the broad yet integrated range of philosophical, strategic, political, cultural, managerial and evaluation capacities implied by the leadership duties supported by all stakeholders, (d) the comparatively high number of leadership accountability processes favoured by some stakeholders that are in dispute, and (e) that most controversy focuses on proposed leadership appraisal processes. The significant differences of means suggest that parents are yet to be as convinced as other groups are of the value of self-appraisal, peer appraisal, appraisal by colleagues and mentoring. The proposed involvement of parental, professional and Departmental personnel in the selection of leaders evokes ambivalence between and within stakeholder groups. While district and high school principals (84% SA+A), district DEA personnel (80%), parents (67.4% ), district high

teachers (59.7%) and primary principals (58.6%) tend to favour cross level involvement, secondary teachers (32%), central DEA personnel (43.8), primary teachers (48.1) do not. This result remains unexplained. On the other hand, the localisation of leader selection is unsupported by all groups.

***Table 5 Support for processes to collect data, report on and improve leaders' leadership***

| Processes Proposed by All Stakeholders | Parents' Views | | All Groups' Views | | Differences of Means | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUPPORTED | Mean | % | Mean | % | *t* | p< |
| appraisal of support and feedback given to staff | 1.84 | 90.4 | 1.78 | 91.8 | 1.02 | ns |
| provision and generation of a school vision | 1.98 | 86.2 | 1.89 | 87.7 | 1.46 | ns |
| skill development programs, eg. in governance and management | 1.99 | 81.5 | 1.90 | 87.1 | 1.23 | ns |
| improved by using feedback from staff | 2.01 | 87.5 | 2.06 | 84.3 | 0.82 | ns |
| quality of reporting to parents and community | 2.01 | 87.5 | 2.11 | 82.1 | 1.80 | ns |
| evaluate the coherence between vision, plans and outcomes | 2.06 | 82.6 | 1.84 | 90.3 | 3.86 | .001 |
| feedback from parents and students | 2.08 | 80.6 | 2.26 | 71.7 | 2.48 | .02 |
| peer networks reflect on challenges of practice | 2.16 | 72.6 | 1.97 | 79.7 | 2.95 | .01 |
| SUPPORT AMBIVALENT | | | | | | |
| parents, teachers, DEA collaborate in principal selection | 2.24 | 67.4 | 2.42 | 60.3 | 1.87 | ns |
| survey of the school climate | 2.28 | 67.6 | 2.17 | 74.4 | 1.53 | ns |
| an appraisal of policy making strategies used | 2.30 | 69.6 | 2.18 | 74.7 | 1.86 | ns |
| self-appraisal | 2.36 | 68.1 | 1.96 | 83.3 | 4.41 | .001 |
| appraisals should be reported to the DEA | 2.43 | 58.5 | 2.76 | 43.3 | 4.09 | .001 |
| an appraisal by school colleagues | 2.43 | 64.1 | 2.24 | 74.0 | 2.25 | .05 |
| an appraisal of the quality of external liaison | 2.44 | 54.8 | 2.40 | 59.8 | 0.51 | ns |
| an appraisal by the P&F/School Council | 2.52 | 55.1 | 2.76 | 47.2 | 2.21 | .05 |
| peer appraisal | 2.55 | 57.0 | 2.25 | 70.7 | 3.73 | .001 |
| improved by using a mentoring process | 2.58 | 45.9 | 2.28 | 60.5 | 3.88 | .001 |
| an appraisal by the DEA | 2.65 | 51.7 | 2.78 | 45.5 | 1.44 | ns |
| appraisals reported to individuals and colleagues as part of the professional development program | 2.75 | 43.3 | 2.99 | 34.2 | 2.76 | .01 |
| appraisals reported to parents as part of school development program | 2.94 | 37.8 | 3.37 | 21.3 | 4.23 | .001 |
| fixed term and negotiated performance contracts | 2.94 | 38.7 | 3.33 | 27.4 | 3.43 | .001 |
| P&F/School Council set leadership service policies | 2.97 | 32.7 | 3.35 | 21.9 | 3.88 | .001 |
| an appraisal by the community | 3.08 | 30.6 | 3.13 | 25.7 | 0.53 | ns |
| UNSUPPORTED | | | | | | |
| more localised selection of leaders | 3.06 | 28.7 | 3.35 | 18.1 | 3.16 | .01 |
| overseas exchanges | 3.30 | 20.0 | 3.02 | 28.8 | 3.14 | .01 |

In sum, Table 5 suggests that while all stakeholders are relatively clear about what they want leaders to be held accountable for, the yet-to-be-articulated leadership accountability processes will probably need to have reliable instrumentation, triangulated data that is handled sensitively, high responsiveness to classroom, school community and systemic perspectives and have explicit links to leader and institutional development. This summation is supported by the data presented in Table 6 overleaf.

The impression created by Table 5, specifically that all stakeholders are relatively clear and in agreement about the purposes of holding leaders accountable while being far less sure about appropriate processes, is borne out by Table 6. Table 6 also confirms that ambivalence begins to arise when criteria are drawn from external research, the DEA, or the community. The

general legitimacy of leadership accountability criteria fall when associated with recommendations from school reviews, the physical environment, leaders' qualifications or national managerial competencies.

***Table 6 Support for criteria for evaluating leaders' leadership services***

| Processes Proposed by All Stakeholders | Parents' Views | | All Groups' Views | | Differences of Means | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SUPPORTED | Mean | % | Mean | % | *t* | p< |
| capacity to hear and care for others | 1.60 | 98.0 | 1.56 | 96.8 | 0.78 | ns |
| student and teacher morale and motivation | 1.74 | 89.3 | 1.77 | 88.8 | 0.47 | ns |
| ability to plan outcomes and achieve priorities | 1.84 | 93.7 | 1.78 | 94.2 | 1.15 | ns |
| the extent to which staff support their leaders | 1.87 | 89.3 | 1.93 | 84.5 | 0.88 | ns |
| the openness and climate/tone of the school | 1.91 | 81.5 | 1.76 | 88.8 | 2.07 | .05 |
| capacity to make and implement policy | 1.93 | 87.8 | 1.86 | 90.9 | 1.20 | ns |
| management and organisational skills (evaluation, budgeting and governance) | 1.93 | 87.1 | 1.89 | 88.3 | 0.58 | ns |
| valuing of creativity and productivity in school | 1.99 | 82.5 | 2.04 | 79.5 | 0.76 | ns |
| evidence of the quality of teaching by the staff | 2.09 | 79.0 | 2.21 | 74.6 | 1.56 | ns |
| extent of collaborative decision-making | 2.11 | 74.0 | 1.93 | 83.4 | 2.47 | .02 |
| evidence of learning by staff and students | 2.13 | 77.3 | 2.16 | 73.6 | 0.37 | ns |
| quality of internal and external communications | 2.17 | 77.4 | 2.10 | 79.9 | 1.01 | ns |
| SUPPORT AMBIVALENT | | | | | | |
| indicators from research literature used in plans to improve leadership | 2.31 | 62.2 | 2.32 | 61.1 | 0.15 | ns |
| capacities as learners and researchers | 2.32 | 76.0 | 2.29 | 68.6 | 0.41 | ns |
| extent of professional development within the school | 2.32 | 69.0 | 2.16 | 74.9 | 1.92 | ns |
| performance indicators in guidelines provided by the DEA | 2.34 | 59.0 | 2.36 | 62.9 | 0.30 | ns |
| the expectations of the community | 2.46 | 64.0 | 2.46 | 61.0 | 0.00 | ns |
| extent to which parents support school leaders | 2.49 | 57.9 | 2.54 | 54.4 | 0.43 | ns |
| recommendations from school reviews | 2.41 | 58.3 | 2.46 | 55.9 | 0.70 | ns |
| leaders' relevant qualifications | 2.51 | 63.7 | 2.75 | 51.7 | 2.39 | .02 |
| the quality of the physical environment | 2.54 | 57.6 | 2.53 | 58.8 | 0.11 | ns |
| national competency indicators for managers | 2.54 | 48.6 | 2.69 | 40.6 | 2.04 | .05 |

## DISCUSSION

When the 53 proposals supported by all stakeholder groups in Tables 1-6 were supplemented by the 27 items that attracted support with only minor levels of ambivalence in only one or two other groups, the 80 proposals were regarded as touchstone for site and system policy reviews by all stakeholder groups. The 80 items were also reclassified into clusters of performance indicators to identify six areas of competence required of leaders and governors who might wish to provide educative accountability processes and criteria (Macpherson and Taplin, 1995). The findings in Tables 1-6 above are now discussed in terms of the same six themes.

First, parents, like all stakeholders, want accountability processes and criteria that help with the clarification of purposes in each school community, provide a bridge between the evaluation of learning, teaching and leadership and planning for improvement, and simultaneously, ensure that each school develops its capacities as a learning organisation. Such an approach is inconsistent with a neo-centralist prescription of what schools are for, a unitary concept of 'system', a uniform concept of 'school' or implementation of systemic policies, or

accounting for the performances of schools, teachers or learners in comparative terms. Instead, the respondents to the *APQ* shared an accountability theory that emphasised a philosophical commitment to communitarian and problem-solving purposes, a democratic accommodation of pluralism and supportive interdependence.

A second theme in the Tables above is the strategic role to be played by accountability processes and criteria. There is regular evidence that all stakeholders value accountability for its provision of collaborative strategic analyses of the situation school communities find themselves in, the opportunity it gives participants to negotiate appropriate indicators of performance, and the imperatives it creates for classroom, professional and school development programs. This theme suggests that the current emphasis on the more technical aspects of 'self-managing' teaching and finance, along with systemic attempts to standardise curriculum and assessment, fails to do justice to the desire among all stakeholders to participate in strategic analysis and direction setting. There is an expressed need for a holistic and inclusionary approach to accountability that integrates philosophical and planning activities.

The third distinct theme is the demand for a responsible and cooperative form of accountability politics. There are regular indications in the data that parents resent exclusionary forms of professionalism, that teachers are troubled by impersonal administration and that administrators are discomforted at being marginalised from education. Hierarchy and social distance, and the use of arbitrary, coercive or manipulative power in education are anathema. Most respondents appear to believe that positional authority should grace and develop the moral economy of organisational micropolitics, that trust and support should preface regulation and sanctions, and that power relationships between stakeholders should be cast in a context of plural legitimate stakeholders, active citizenship and educational partnerships. The generally expressed preference for responsive and responsible accounting between stakeholders with mutual obligations runs counter to the contractual and technical forms of accountability promoted by the political, market and managerial mechanisms more typical of corporate 'self-management', LMS and SBM.

A fourth theme is the importance of accountability with regard to the development of supportive classroom and staffroom environments. Strongly supported references to positive attitudes in staff and students, quality communications, caring behaviours, open and participative decision processes, and development programs in governance and management indicated that accountability was held to be central to the development and improvement of educational cultures. These group, institutional and systemic cultures were clearly assumed to be interactive and complementary, rather than independent and competitive, and embedded in fiduciary rather than in market or power networks. Education is principally defined as a cultural activity in classrooms or work groups. Most organisational concepts evident in the items identified relationships in the classroom as the basic educational structure, with classroom relationships intermittently linked as 'school' or socially embedded in 'school community', while 'the system' was even less frequently as a collective noun for 'schools'.

Fifth is the theme of managerial effectiveness and efficiency. The evidence above is that while all stakeholders expect position holders to discharge their management duties, they define these duties using a complex range of technical, professional and school community perspectives. Management duties were defined in three realms that outstrip the limits of economic rationalism. The first realm of duty implies accounting for the acquisition, management and development of resources. Examples might include collaborative program budgeting and human resource development. The second set of duties mean accounting for the quality of support structures and processes in schooling, such as quality teams and cooperative program evaluation. The third form of duty means accounting for the quality of the processes

used to make and implement policies, such as the quality of governance, action research and information and decision systems. Accountability by these lights defines effective and efficient management in both immediate educational and broader communitarian terms in a context of multi-level democratic structures.

The sixth theme is the assumption by all stakeholders that accountability practices are to serve both summative and formative evaluation purposes. Summative demand was seen in strongly supported proposals for the monitoring of outcomes and attitudes, the measurement of students' progress, self-esteem and life skills, and the surveying of school climate and stakeholders' policy preferences. Formative demand was evident in proposals concerned with the provision of feedback and appraisal systems linked into classroom and school development programs. While there was a less surety over the most appropriate teaching and leadership accountability processes, as compared to those related to accounting for learning, the support for accountability criteria across all three activities was even and high. This suggests that the quality of learning, teaching and leadership require different accountability policy debates to determine best processes, the principles underpinning preferred evaluative criteria are available and relatively coherent.

## TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The research reported here must be interpreted with caution. The data are derived from a broader study and must be regarded as provisional, normative and idealistic. The statistical analysis is limited to descriptive procedures and actual practices are yet to be mapped with precision. On the other hand, the categories of policy preferences are well grounded, stakeholder sensitive and validated by an iterative and cooperative policy process in a bounded state education system. Given these conditions, the following tentative conclusions appear to be warranted.

There is surprisingly little support in the Australian home of the 'self-managing school' for contractual accountability to employers, parents or designated corporate managers. Parents, teachers, principals and government education officials at district and state level also share a view that moral accountability to clients and professional accountability to peers should be set aside in favour of responsive and mutual accountability between stakeholders. The 12 principles identified by ACCSO and APC are strongly supported although this research suggests even more specific operational principles and organisational preferences.

With regard to accounting for learning, the processes and criteria favoured by all stakeholders (a) focus on improving relationships and collaborative action research in classrooms, while (b) affirming the legitimacy and value of national and state profiles and performance indicators, research findings and teacher moderation. Accounting for teaching is held by all stakeholders to be (a) a school level responsibility with a broad consensus over processes and criteria, with (b) parents intimating some disquiet over exclusionary professionalism and how reliance on professional development is displacing classroom development in a school community context. Stakeholders are relatively clear and in agreement about (a) the purposes of holding leaders accountable, while (b) being far less sure about appropriate processes. Again, parents are concerned about the reliability of intra-professional processes.

With regard to organisational preferences, this educative accountability touchstone provides little support for (a) a neo-centralist and unitary concept of 'system', (b) planning, coordination and policy implementation by corporate managers, (c) comparative assessment of learning, teaching of leadership, (d) partitioned curriculum and standardised resource management, (e) communications within and between stakeholders being mediated by

positional authority, or (f) incentives based on political or market devices. Conversely there is strong support among all stakeholders for (a) a liberal, communitarian, pragmatic and pluralist philosophy of administration, (b) an inclusionary, simultaneous and holistic approach to policy making, planning and implementation, (c) a trustful, supportive and group-based approach to change management, (d) classrooms relationships seen as primary educational structure, and (e) improvement, accountability and legitimation seen as school community projects.

Until more targeted research can map actual practices, it might be reasonable to assume that subsidiarity, pluriformity and complementarity are far more strongly favoured by immediate stakeholders than neo-centralist corporate management, structural uniformity or performance comparability in 'self-managed' schools.

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